

TRANSCRIPT FOR DIGITAL TOWN HALL (EDITED VERSION):

Moderator: Please submit your questions here for the Digital Town Hall for American Citizen Services Dec. 7 (8 PM).

Moderator: Hi folks! Thanks for joining us. The ACS Chief will be with us shortly and start answering your questions.

ACS Chief: Hello Everyone. Seems like we have a great turnout for tonight's event. That's great. It's a first time for us, so your feedback is appreciated. If it is successful we can do it on a regular basis!

SANDEEP SOOD: I am a U.S. Citizen and I've completed my studies through high school in India. I would like to pursue further studies in the U.S. and I'd like to find out more about potential opportunities.

ACS Chief: Hi Sandeep, and thanks for your interest in studying in the U.S. You can go to the USIEF U.S.-India Education Foundation for more information (www.usief.org.in).

Rajiv Sircar: Hello, I am from Agra - what is an "apostille"?:(

ACS Chief: Ah! An "apostille" is a special authentication given by one government on an official document that allows it to be used in another country. For example, if you want to have your Indian birth certificate made official so that it will be accepted as an official document in the US, you must get an "apostille" on it from the ministry of External Affairs here in India. More info here <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/authenticate-indian-documents.html>

Rajiv Sircar: Will it be possible to have other sessions like this to ask questions about filing taxes, social security forms, and/or health benefits?

ACS Chief: We can certainly hold sessions like this in the future dedicated to social security and tax issues. Thanks for the idea. But again, please send us your questions to acsnd@state.gov and we can do our best to help you at any time.

Charles King: We are due to have a child in about 10 days. Please tell us the protocol for establishing U.S. citizenship for children born abroad. Do we need to have documents before going to the hospital?

ACS Chief: Hi Charles, and congrats on the upcoming addition to your family. As for establishing the U.S. citizenship of your newborn child, we will have to look at U.S. Immigration law to ensure your child has acquired citizenship. It gets a bit complicated depending on if both parents are US citizens, or just one, or if the child was born while you were both married or not. But generally speaking, you don't need to do anything before going to the hospital. After the birth go on-line to our webpage and make an appointment to apply for a "Report of Birth Abroad of a US citizen child" and we can walk you through it. More information is available at: <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/reporting-births-and-citizenship-questions.html>

Venkatesh: Can I renew my minor daughter's U.S. Passport during the next Bangalore outreach program? Her current passport expires tomorrow.

ACS Chief: Hi Venkatesh. You should be able to apply during the next consular outreach in Bangalore. That is organized by our consulate in Chennai and I suggest you contact them for more information about it (chennaics@state.gov).

sumer singh bhullar: My daughter's passport is expiring in 6 months. Do we need to be physically present in New Delhi to get it renewed?

ACS Chief: If your daughter is under the age of 16 then both parents need to sign the passport application. We recommend that you both come for the actual application, but if one of you can't make it the parent that cannot be there can fill out a form in advance saying that they agree to the issuance of a passport in this case, and then that

form must be notarized. More information can be found at: <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/passports-births-citizenship/new-child-under-16-passport.html>

Charles King: Thank you. I was also wondering who is entitled to shop in the American Embassy Commissary here in Delhi. Are retired US military personal eligible?

ACS Chief: Sorry Charles, but shopping in the U.S. Embassy Commissary is strictly regulated by diplomatic protocols. You have to be a recognized diplomat here in India to have access. But having seen some of the supermarkets springing up in Delhi, I can tell you that you have more of a selection there.

sarvjit singh: I have been a U.S. citizen for over 25 years. I moved to India 5 years ago and don't know if and when I will return to the U.S. If I stay in India, will that affect my social security benefits? I am 67 years old and planning to go on social security at age 70.

ACS Chief: If you worked 40 quarters in the U.S. you should be eligible to start collecting social security once you reach the right age. Please send an email to acsnd@state.gov for more info!

Maninderjit Singh: Hi, I am a retired U.S. citizen living in India. I will be visiting the U.S. during the XMAS holidays for 6 weeks. Can I take my maid, who has worked for us for the last 11 years with me for this trip? I have sufficient means to pay for her trip.

ACS Chief: I should start off by saying we are not connected to the visa unit, for good reason. That said, your maid is certainly allowed to apply for a visa to the U.S., but it will be up to a consular officer to determine if she is eligible for one. Consular officers must apply U.S. immigration law when determining if a person is eligible for a US visa, chief among them, if the person applying is an intending immigrant or not. If they can prove this to a consular officer beyond a doubt, then she might get the visa. But if the consular officer has any doubts, he or she is required to say no.

Maninderjit Singh: I agree you can't exactly answer immigration questions. Of course. The other point I wanted to clarify was if I can sponsor her for this visit. In other words can I give an undertaking to bear all her expenses for the visit?

ACS Chief: Hi Maninderjit. Whether you are sponsoring your maid or making guarantees for her will not affect the outcome of the visa application. Consular officers can only follow U.S. law and adjudicate her visa application on whether she may be an intending immigrant or not.

sumer singh bhullar: My son was born in India about 3 years ago, and I and my wife were married at that time. I am a U.S. citizen while my wife is Indian citizen. Can we apply for my son's birth abroad and get him U.S. citizenship?

ACS Chief: If you were a citizen at the time of the birth then there is a good chance he is a citizen as well, but there are other criteria. I would suggest having a look at this webpage (<http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/reporting-births-and-citizenship-questions.html>) and then, if you feel he qualifies, go ahead and make an appointment. If he doesn't qualify, then an immigrant visa is a possibility

arun raj: If I lose my passport while touring India, what documents will be required for a rapid reissue of a new one?

ACS Chief: Hi Arun, you can check our webpage on that: <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/passports-births-citizenship/lost-or-stolen-passport.html>. But it's a good idea to have a photocopy of your photo page as well as of your visa. If you lose your passport you will need to get special permission (an exit visa) from the Indian government (FRRO) before you can leave, so there will be more involved than just getting an emergency passport.

Sridhar Pydah: Hi, great idea to do an online session. I have couple of questions. (1) I and my wife adopted a baby girl in India 4 years ago. How should we go about getting her citizenship/immigrant visa? (2) My wife is an Indian citizen and I'm a U.S. Citizen. We didn't renew the green card for my wife after moving to India. For which

immigrant visa do we need to apply?

ACS Chief: Hi Sridhar. Since I am not familiar with the details of your case, I would suggest contacting our immigrant visa unit for more information. It sounds like your child might qualify for an immigrant visa. As for the green card for your wife, you can apply for what's called a "returning resident visa" (if you can prove that her failure to return was the result of forces beyond your control), or you can simply start the immigrant visa process again and apply for what is called an IR-1 visa.

Venkatesh: Will these questions and answers be posted on the website? There is a lot of very useful information being given out, which will be very useful to us even after this session is over.

ACS Chief: Hi Venkatesh. Yes, we hope to post a transcript of this on our website soon. Keep an eye out.

sumer singh bhullar: I came to India 4 years ago to live and work. I have not returned to the U.S. since then. Do I need to do anything to hold onto my US citizenship?

ACS Chief: Hi Sumer. Nope. Once you have that U.S. passport it is yours for life, unless you decide to officially renounce your citizenship. You can stay in India for the rest of your life. Isn't America great! Please know, however, that the Indian government does not recognize dual citizenship. If you were an Indian citizen and became an American citizen you would be expected to give up your Indian passport.

Sridhar Pydah: Are U.S. citizens living in the National Capital Region eligible to enroll their kids at the American Embassy School? If so, where can I get more information?

ACS Chief: Hi Sridhar. To go to the American Embassy School you must apply there directly. Please see their website (www.aes.ac.in).

sumer singh bhullar: Sir, I am living in India because all of my siblings are here. I am not renouncing my U.S. citizenship, but my sister would like for me to stay with her in India for an extended period. Is that okay?

ACS Chief: If you are a U.S. citizen you will not lose your citizenship because you are out of the country for an extended period.

sarvajit singh: Apologies for asking this question again: do you know if I have to pay income tax when I receive Social Security benefits?

ACS Chief: Hi Sarvajit. Social Security questions can be complex. Write to us at acsnd@state.gov and we can give you all the information you need on the subject!

Priya Chawla: I am a U.S. citizen living in India permanently. My question is if a person passes away and has life insurance in the U.S., what should the family members do?

ACS Chief: Hi Priya, I'm not sure I understand the question. Are you looking to cash in on the policy?

Priya Chawla: Yes I am looking to cash in on the policy.

ACS Chief: You'll need to contact the insurance company about the specifics of the policy, but I can tell you that normally, after an American passes away here in India, the consular office can issue what is called a "Consular Report of Death Abroad of a US citizen". This can be helpful in these cases. More information can be found here: http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/emergencies/death/death_3878.html.

RUCHIKA: My brother is a U.S. citizen, and he wants to further his studies in the U.S. How can he find more information on colleges there?

ACS Chief: How old is your brother? He can apply for a college online or look for other study opportunities. But since he is a U.S. citizen he can go back to study whenever he wants. Does that answer your questions?

RUCHIKA: Can I get a help from someone at the U.S. Embassy to guide me through the process of helping me look for a good college?

ACS Chief: Hi Ruchika. You should try the U.S. India Education Foundation (www.usief.org.in). They might be able to help with this.

RUCHIKA: If we have a financial crisis can we get a help from the U.S. government?

ACS Chief: Excellent question. Unfortunately the Embassy does not have the resources to help Americans in financial distress, but we can help you look for solution, or can help you receive money transferred from friends or family in the U.S. If you have a particular issue, we suggest you tell us about it at acsnd@state.gov and we can talk about it more

RUCHIKA: Is it possible for my mother to get the green card?

ACS Chief: Ruchika, if your brother is a U.S. citizen then he may be able to petition for your mother. All of your questions about immigrant visas can be answered by looking at http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/immigrant_visas.html, or you can contact infousdelhi@vfshelpline.com.

RUCHIKA: If my brother wants to study in any European countries, will he need a student visa?

ACS Chief: Yes, he would need a visa to study in just about any country other than the U.S. Most countries require it. Please check with the Embassy of the country your brother is considering for more info

RUCHIKA: What about travel visas?

ACS Chief: A good place to find out which countries require Americans to have visas (travel, study, etc.) is www.travel.state.gov. Please have a look there.

sumer singh bhullar: Does the U.S. Embassy have an office in the Punjab or Chandigarh?

ACS Chief: Sumer, at the moment we do not have an embassy or consulate in the Punjab. Sometimes consular officers travel up there and provide services such as accepting passport applications or doing notaries. If you haven't signed up with the Embassy through STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program), we can send you messages announcing these special events.

sumer singh bhullar: My wife who is an Indian citizen who has lived in U.S. for a couple of years. Her green card expired about 4 years ago. Can I apply for her green card here in New Delhi?

ACS Chief: Sumer, if your wife has been out of the U.S. for over a year than she will either have to apply for a "returning resident visa" (if she can show she stayed away because of forces beyond her control), or else you will have to start the visa process over again and apply for an immigrant visa for your wife.

sumer singh bhullar: Can I do that on the U.S. Embassy New Delhi website?

ACS Chief: Yes, you can read more about it here http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/immigrant_visas.html.

Carl Stefanizzi: I am a tourist in India. I will be going to Nepal for two weeks and then returning to India for a few weeks before returning to the U.S. How can I get around the two-month rule?

ACS Chief: HI Carl. Well, that's hard because the Indian government is very strict about this. You will need permission before re-entering India. You might want to check out this flyer from Indian Immigration that can answer some of your questions. <http://www.immigrationindia.nic.in/FAQ-TVis.pdf>.

Fred: Enjoying the Town Hall. I have a question: how do I register with the Embassy and what will it get me?

ACS Chief: Hi Fred! You are strongly encouraged to register with the Smart Travel Enrolment Program (STEP) through the following website <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui>. By registering and giving us your email address you will automatically receive security and other notices that we send out to Americans in India, and by giving us your itinerary and contact information you will make it easier for us to locate you in an emergency.

sarvjit singh: My friend, who is a U.S. citizen, lost her passport at the airport (or it was stolen). The police will not register a complaint unless they are bribed. Can the U.S. embassy call the police precinct on our behalf?

ACS Chief: Hi Sarvjit. Normally the US Embassy is not permitted to involve itself in the Indian judicial or legal processes. But if you run into problems like the one you describe, please contact us at acsnd@state.gov and we will see if there is something we can do to help.

Fred: I am an U.S. business owner and am having trouble with a client who owes me money. What can I do?

ACS Chief: Fred, we sometimes get questions like this. This is a link to the U.S. Commercial Service website, where you will find contact information <http://www.buyusa.gov/india>. You might also consider contacting the Better Business Bureau to file a complaint: <http://odr.bbb.org/complaints/>. The information will then be shared with the consumer protection agencies of several countries.

You can also turn to the Indian Trade associations to seek their advice in this matter:

Federation Of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI)
Federation House
Tansen Marg
New Delhi 110 001
Tel: 337 8760-65
Fax: 332 0714

Indo-American Chamber of Commerce
PHD House, Opp. Asiad Village
New Delhi 110 016
Tel: 696 3387
Fax: 651 8201

You can also go to the FCS website <http://export.gov/india/frequentlyansweredquestions/index.asp> to see general guidance about complaints.

Bill Sandhu: Has anyone asked about the looting of Immoveable Properties of foreign resident Indians by brothers, sisters, relatives in collusion with Punjabi Government officials and politicians, complete with death threats?

ACS Chief: Hi Bill. Yes, what you describe does happen. We really suggest that you enlist the help of a good attorney. That is the best way you can protect yourself. We have a list of some great attorneys that you can consult. Please have a look at <http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/service/other-citizen-services/judicial-assistance.html>.